

Architectural Style in Kansas

This is the first in a series of architectural style articles that will be published in *Kansas Preservation*. The articles are designed to provide general background information about architectural style and also may be used as context statements for National Register nominations.

The following publications may be helpful for determining and describing style:

Blumenson, John. *Identifying American Architecture* (American Association of State and Local History, Nashville, 1977).

Harris, Cyril. *Dictionary of Architecture and Construction* (McGraw-Hill, New York, 1975).

McAlester, Virginia and Lee. *A Field Guide to American Houses* (Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York, 1984).

Poppeliers, John, and S. Allen Chambers. *What Style is It?* (Preservation Press, Washington, DC, 1983).

Whiffen, Marcus. *American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to the Styles* (M. I. T. Press, Cambridge, 1969).



The Sauer Castle in Kansas City is an excellent example of the Italian Villa style. It was built in 1871 for \$20,000.

Italianate Architecture Gains Popularity in 19th Century Kansas

The nineteenth-century Italianate style was used for residential, commercial, and institutional architecture. Popularized by pattern books like Andrew Jackson Downing's *Cottage Residences*, the Italianate style dominated American architecture by the 1860s. Conceived as a reaction against the strict symmetry of classical design, the Italianate style provided a template for both rural and urban builders.

In Kansas, Italianate-influenced architecture was built from 1865 until 1885. During this twenty-year period Kansas experienced significant growth in its population, economy, and government structure. Early examples of the Italianate style are located in the eastern part of the

state, in cities like Kansas City, Leavenworth, and Lawrence. As the population settled statewide, evidence of the Italianate influence is found in smaller communities by the early 1880s.

Classified as picturesque or romantic architecture, the Italianate style integrated an eclectic interpretation of classically based elements into irregular forms and shapes. Extremely fine interpretations of the Italianate were built in Kansas, but most of the buildings derive their stylistic association from the applied features. The most commonly identified features of Italianate architecture include large eave brackets; wide, overhanging eaves; and tall, narrow arched windows. Other features that may occur include quoining,



(Top Left) The Prescott School employs heavy brackets, a belvedere, and arched windows to place it within the Italianate tradition. Built in 1883, it served the educational needs of the Prescott community in Linn County.

(Above) The Italianate features of the 1872 David Powers House grace Leavenworth County's Salt Creek valley.

(Left) Lincoln's Cummins Block was completed in 1882. The rusticated limestone building achieves its Italianate style through a series of arcade windows and doors, integrated with a broad entablature and large, supporting brackets.

Glossary

Belvedere - rooftop pavilion from which a vista can be enjoyed

Fenestration - arrangement and design of windows in a building

Loggia - arcaded or colonnaded porch or gallery

Oriel - bay window projecting from upper story

Quoin - a hard stone or brick, used with similar ones, to reinforce an external corner or edge of a wall; often distinguished decoratively from adjacent masonry; may be imitated in non-load bearing materials.

bay windows, oriels, string courses, and porches. Although built primarily of brick, examples of wood and stone Italianate structures are also found in Kansas.

Residential examples of the Italianate are grouped into two main types, the Italian Villa and the Tuscan Villa. The Italian Villa is asymmetrical with a prominent tower, an off-center entrance, and cross-gabled roofs. Examples of the Italian Villa may feature pronounced entablatures, elaborate window and door surround moldings, raised rusticated stone foundations, and loggias. The verticality, asymmetry, and varying fenestration distinguish the

Italian Villa from the more traditional Tuscan Villa. The Tuscan Villa is essentially a cube covered with a flat or low-pitched hipped roof. A belvedere may rise from the roof's center. Decorative detailing may include many of the features employed for the Italianate Villa.

While residential occurrences of the Italianate are found between 1865 and 1875, Italianate styling influenced commercial and institutional architecture in Kansas during the next decade. These examples apply the key design features of the Italianate—arched fenestration, tall and narrow windows, large brackets, and deep

eaves—to achieve the impression of the style. The derivative nature of style ultimately comes to rest in the vernacular applications of building traditions. Whether the commercial and institutional structures built during the third quarter of the 19th century are true versions of the Italianate style is less important than the elements of the style that were incorporated into each structure.

By the late 1880s the High Victorian Gothic Revival, Romanesque Revival, and Queen Anne styles supplanted the Italianate. Evidence of its dominance remains in almost every city and county in the state settled before 1880.

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